

some of the 77,000 retired military in the Third District of North Carolina.

These are the brave men and women who, serving now or in the past, dedicated their lives to preserving peace for all America. Yet, despite the enormous responsibility they have to protect our Nation's security, they are faced with drastic cuts in defense spending, and struggle every day to do more with less.

Mr. Speaker, the reality of these cuts is frightening. Our U.S. forces are 32 percent lower than 10 years ago. In 1992, when President Clinton took office, we had 18 army divisions. Now we have 10. In 1992 we had 24 fighter wings. We now have 13. In 1992 we had 546 Navy ships. Now we have just over 300.

Mr. Speaker, I am noticing an alarming trend. Perhaps this administration does not realize that cutting back on the Nation's defense capabilities threatens our ability to protect our Nation. The men and women who serve this country cannot do the job without adequate resources and without adequate forces.

It is time for the administration to make national security a priority. We cannot continue to sit idly by and allow the American people to rest in a false sense of security. The truth is, while the threat to our Nation's security grows, our military forces continue to decline.

As a Member of Congress, and like so many American citizens, I am concerned about the fact that the United States does not have a capable missile defense system, and quite frankly, America is neither prepared nor equipped to handle the threat of a ballistic missile attack.

A bipartisan commission recently issued a report confirming that a ballistic missile threat to the United States is greater than we imagine, and perhaps, even worse, that threat is growing. The report says that we have failed to understand the degree to which our Nation's security is threatened, but the threat is real.

Mr. Speaker, if there was an accident today and a Nation mistakenly launched a ballistic missile at the United States, we would have 15 minutes to act. But whether we had 15 minutes or 15 days, the issue is not time, the issue is that the United States does not have a capable missile defense system. We do not have an adequate system because we do not have the funding.

Just 2 months ago the House passed the defense authorization bill for fiscal year 1999. The administration's request for the defense budget request this year represents the 14th consecutive year of real decline in defense spending.

I want to repeat that, Mr. Speaker. The administration's request for the defense budget request this year represents the 14th consecutive year of real decline in defense spending. In fact, the defense budget request is the lowest real level of U.S. defense spending since before the Korean War. This trend cannot continue.

Mr. Speaker, the Cold War is over, but the threat to our Nation's security is ever present. Despite what the commission reports as a very real and growing threat, defense has been cut nearly in half under the Clinton administration alone. We cannot continue to stand by and let the American people assume our military has the necessary means to defend the freedoms of this Nation.

I urge my colleagues to call upon the administration to take responsibility for our Nation's decline in defense, and work with Congress to restore a military force that is capable and ready. We owe it to the American public and we owe it to ourselves. Most importantly, our Nation's security depends on it. May God bless America.

ANNOUNCING HEARING ON H.R. 836, FILIPINO VETERANS EQUITY ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I want to again remind the Members of this House that on Wednesday, July 22, at 10 in the morning, there will be a hearing before the Committee on Veterans Affairs.

This is not just a normal oversight hearing, not just a normal markup of an ordinary bill, but the culmination of more than 50 years of struggle for justice and honor will be presented at this hearing.

A 15-year battle for justice and honor will be coming to a head at this hearing, because more than 50 years ago, the brave Filipino soldiers of World War II, soldiers who were drafted into our Armed Forces by President Roosevelt, soldiers who exhibited great courage at the epic battles of Bataan and Corregidor, were unceremoniously deprived of all their veterans' benefits by the Congress of 1946.

Whereas there were almost a quarter of a million soldiers who were involved at that time, there are less than 75,000 alive today. Their last wish, Mr. Speaker, their last wish is to have the honor and dignity that was due them restored by this Congress, the honor and dignity of being recognized as veterans of World War II.

The chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. STUMP), will be conducting this hearing. The subject will be H.R. 836, the Filipino Veterans Equity Act, sponsored by the distinguished chairman of the Committee on International Relations, the gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN) and myself.

Almost 200 cosponsors are part of this bill now, and what this bill says is that we will restore dignity and honor to these proud veterans. We will remedy historical injustice. We will make good on the promise of what America is.

Let me just remind my colleagues that President Truman, in 1946, recognized the injustice that was being done by the Congress at that time. Here is what he said in a statement back in February of 1946. I am quoting President Truman:

Filipino army veterans are nationals of the United States and will continue in that status until July 4, 1946. They fought as American nationals under the American flag and under the direction of our military leaders. They fought with gallantry and courage under the most difficult conditions during the recent conflict. Their officers were commissioned by us. Their official organization, the Army of the Philippine Commonwealth, was taken into the Armed Forces of the United States by executive order of President Roosevelt on July 26, 1941. That order has never been revoked or amended. I consider it a moral obligation of the United States to look after the welfare of the Filipino army veterans.

That moral obligation remains with us in this Congress, as it did with the Congress of 1946. At this hearing on Wednesday, July 22, at 10 in the morning, a living history, a living American history, will be presented to the American public. We will have testimony by survivors of the infamous Death March from Bataan in 1942.

Brigadier General Nanadiego, who is now a special presidential representative for the Office of Veterans Affairs at the Embassy of the Philippines, will give his emotional story. He was on the Death March, where thousands of people died during the days that that march was taking place. There was brutality, there were assassinations, there was much suffering on that march.

General Nanadiego survived that march, survived conditions in the prisoner of war camp, and then joined the guerrilla resistance movement until the Philippines was in fact restored to its independence, first under General MacArthur, and then getting its own independence a little later.

We will hear testimony this Wednesday from Lieutenant Colonel Edwin Ramsey, an American officer in the Philippines who escaped after the fall of Bataan and organized guerrilla action in the Philippines for several years. It was that guerrilla action that held up the advance of the Japanese for much longer than American analysts thought, and allowed us to prepare the Philippines for MacArthur's return a few years later.

Let us recognize the bravery and gallantry of the Filipino veterans. Let us pass H.R. 836. Let us give equity now to these brave veterans of World War II.

NIH MUST ESTABLISH PRIORITIES BASED UPON NEED

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, no one, including myself, would ever fault the